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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000493

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: "GOVERNMENT OF RECONCILIATION" NOT YET CERTAIN

REF: LILONGWE 488

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Eighteen days after his controversial election, President Bingu wa Mutharika has still to appoint a cabinet. Meanwhile, the Office of the President and Cabinet has postponed the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speakers of Parliament (ostensibly over legal technicalities). The delayed appointment of a cabinet and the postponed election of the Speaker indicate that the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) is not yet confident in the viability of its "government of reconciliation," which was designed to give it a working majority in Parliament. END SUMMARY.

SPEAKER'S ELECTION POSTPONED

2. (U) On the eve of the June 7 swearing-in and orientation of new parliamentarians, the Clerk of Parliament announced that pursuant to a letter from the Secretary of the Office of President and Cabinet (OPC), Parliament's leadership will not be elected until the President officially calls the first session of Parliament. The OPC statement indicated that the Constitution requires the Speaker and Deputy Speakers to be elected at the first session of Parliament and not at an "unofficial" organizational meeting, as had been previously announced.

STILL NO CABINET

3. (SBU) Yet to announce his cabinet, President Bingu wa Mutharika, along with United Democratic Front (UDF) chairman Bakili Muluzi, continues to seek support from independents and opposition MPs to gain a working majority in Parliament. The UDF's June 3 signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Republican Party (RP) and the Movement for Genuine Democratic Change (MGODE) has garnered the UDF several seats in the House and has cost it at least five cabinet level-positions (reftel). In addition, a Blantyre business contact told econoff that Muluzi has been soliciting funds from business leaders in the U.K. and South Africa in order to secure a majority in the House.

COMMENT

4. (SBU) It is unclear which RP and MGODE officials will receive cabinet-level positions. RP President Gwanda Chakuamba, who was thought to be interested in the Second Vice Presidency, maintains that he plans "to retire from politics."

5. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Bartering for parliamentarians' support is ongoing, and it is clearly getting expensive. The delay in announcing the cabinet and OPC's directive to postpone the election of Parliament's leadership (while technically a legal question) indicate that the UDF has not yet acquired the majority it seeks. END COMMENT
DOUGHERTY